HISTORY OF HARTLEY BANK COLLIERY

Coal has been mined at Hartley Bank Colliery for well over a century. The existing Old Hards Deam, No.1 Shaft, was first sunk about 1841, 130 yards to the Flockton Thin Seam which was actually worked in 1843. 32 years later the shaft was deepened by another 28 yards to the Old Hards Seam, which was worked from 1876 to 1914. It was from this seam that coal was sent to Buckingham Palace for domestic use during Queen Victoria's reign.

The workings in the Flockton Thin Seam in the early days were ventilated by a furnace built near the shaft at seam level. The air was drawn round the roadways by the draught from the fire, and the fumes and smoke passed away through a short chimney which led into the shaft. This old furnace can still be seen, as some of the old roads near the shaft are still accessible.

No.2 Shaft, fromwhich coal is also drawn, was first sunk in 1881 to the New Hards Seam, and then in 1917 it was deepened a further 26 yards to the Wheatley Lime Seam. Both these seams, and later the Beeston Seam, were worked from this shaft.

No.3 Shaft goes down to the New Hards level, a depth of 204 yards. It is solely used as the upcast shaft from which the return air is drawn from both pits by a 200 h.p. electrically driven fan.

It was at this colliery that one of the very fist coal - cutters, a disc type machine withopen gears was used. It was introduced by a Mr.Sutcliffe, who was anofficial at the colliery at the time, and who later founded the firm of Richard Sutcliffe Ltd., Horbury.

The Screening Plant was erected in 1921, and in 1924 some of the first Jigger Pan Conveyors were used in the thin seams. In 1927 the first Belt Conveyors in Yorkshire were installed at Hartley Bank. These conveyors were only 5 inches high and were used in eighteen inch seams.

In 1944, during the last war, when experiments were being made with Power Loading machinery, one of the first machines of this type to be used in the West Yorkshire Coalfield was operating 7 days a week at this colliery and giving very good results. It was withdrawn from use after the seam became too thin for it to operate.

From 1917 to 1947 three seams were worked at Hartley Bank, the Flodton Thin , the New Hards and the Wheatley Lime, the latter being the thickest at 2'4", whilst the New Hards was only 1'2" in some areas.

In 1944 the Beeston Seam was proved by a diamond borehole and also by a steep dipping drift from the Wheatley Lime Seam 84 yards above.

At the present day, extensive workings are carried out in the Beeston and Wheatley Seams only, with anapproximate output of some 250,000 tons per year, and an average manpower of some 600 men. The thickness of the seam worked being an average of 32" from Wheatley and 45" from Beeston. The coal from the Beeston Seam is brought into the Wheatley Pit Bottom by a system of conveyor belts and then transferred into 1 ton tubs to be brought out of the pit.

Recently 2 faces have been fully mechanised in Beeston Seam, one having an Anderton Shearer machine, the other a Trepanner machine. Both these machines cut and strip the coal, feeding it onto an armoured conveyor and all the men have basically to do is, to move the machine up to the coal face and then re-set the hydraulic props - These give us more output per shift and reduces the amount of manpower required at the face, thus making men available for other work.

Approxiamately 30% of the output of coal is sold to the Y.E.B. being transported by barge on the canal which runs practically through the pit yard. The remainder of the coal is transferred to a neighbouring pit where it is washed and sold to outside industries.

It is of interest to note,that Hartley Bank was the first colliery in the locality to be 100% mechanised with the surface facilities, and it was the first Pit in the district to have Pithead Baths. These were built in 1933, and have since been enlarged and modernised.

For the future, arrangements are now underhand to re-open areas of Flockton Seam, Old Hards, New Hards, Blocking Bed and possibly Black Bed seams, there being quite a good number of years during which coal can still be economically extracted from the Pit, the exact number of years, time and atomic development alone will tell.